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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 004141

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SUBJECT: CODEL BURTON MEETS WITH DEFENSE MINISTER AND NAVY
OPERATIONS COMMANDER

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for reasons
1.5 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) CODEL Burton was briefed by Defense Minister Jorge Uribe and Naval Operations Commander Vice Admiral Guillermo Barrera on April 23. Uribe said President Uribe's Democratic Security Strategy was designed to combat drug trafficking and terrorism and provided statistics on growing amounts of seized drugs, dropping murder rates, and other indicators of the strategy's success. He emphasized that U.S. support was key to sustained progress. Barrera discussed counterdrug strategies on the north and Pacific coasts and rivers. In 2004, the Navy seized almost USD 2 billion worth of drugs. He noted that the Navy was working to open more bases and develop better interdiction equipment. End summary.

MOD: Focus on Drugs and Terrorism

2. (C) On April 23, Minister of Defense (MOD) Uribe discussed the GOC's Democratic Security Strategy with CODEL Burton. He said the two principle threats facing Colombia are drug trafficking and terrorism. The Democratic Security Strategy aims to strengthen and guarantee the rule of law by (1) establishing state control of all national territory; (2) protecting the rural and urban population; (3) eliminating drug trafficking; (4) maintaining an offensive capacity against the illegal armed groups; and (5) guaranteeing transparency and accountability of state institutions. By the end of his term, President Uribe wants to have severely damaged the drug trafficking industry, diminished state corruption, and established healthy employment levels. The MOD emphasized that national security was required for social and economic development.

3. (U) Minister Uribe offered some examples of progress:

-- Aerial eradication of coca: between April 2004 and March 2005, 152,839 hectares were sprayed. During the same period the year before, 131,474 hectares were sprayed. As of March, 396,163 hectares had been sprayed since President Uribe took office. Between January and March of this year, 58,173 hectares were sprayed, a 39 percent increase from the same period in 2004.

-- Aerial eradication of opium poppy: In 2004, 3,061 hectares were sprayed. In 2003, 2,995 hectares, in 2002, 3,372, and in 2001, 2,268.

-- Cocaine seized: Between April 2004 and March 2005, 145 tons were seized. During the same period the year before, 136.5 tons were seized. As of March, 332.1 tons had been seized since Uribe took office. Between January and March of this year, 38 tons were seized, a decrease of eight percent from the same period in 2004.

-- Precursor chemicals seized: Between April 2004 and March 2005, 2,102 tons of solid chemicals and 1,237 gallons of liquids were seized. During the same period the year before, 2,825 tons and 1,965 gallons were seized. As of March, 7,613 tons and 4,642 gallons had been seized since Uribe took office.

-- Drug production labs destroyed: Between April 2004 and March 2005, 1,841 labs were destroyed. During the same time the year before, 1,740 labs were destroyed. As of March, 4,372 had been destroyed since Uribe took office. Between January and March of this year, 555 had been destroyed, a decrease of 11 percent since 2004.

-- Air Bridge Denial: Between January and March of 2005, two planes had been destroyed and four impounded. The MOD emphasized that none of the planes had been shot down, but rather forced to land and destroyed on the ground. In 2004, 17 were destroyed and 21 impounded; in 2003, eight were destroyed and 23 impounded; in 2002, six were destroyed and five were impounded; in 2001, seven were destroyed and 11 impounded; and in 2000, 23 were destroyed and 17 impounded. Uribe noted that the numbers demonstrated the importance of having re-started Air Bridge Denial in 2003.

-- Murders: in 2002, there were over 29,000 murders in the country. In 2004, there were approximately 20,000. Between 2002 and 2003 murders fell 18 percent and between 2003 and 2004 14 percent. Uribe noted that Medellin's murder rate, which used to be the highest in the country, had been cut in half.

-- Kidnappings: Between April 2004 and March 2005, there were 675 kidnappings. During the same period the year before, there were 1,310. As of March, there had been 3,137 kidnappings since Uribe took office, a drop of 36 percent compared to the Pastrana administration. Between January and March of this year, there were 87 kidnappings, a drop of 56 percent compared to the same period in 2004.

-- Terrorist attacks (including on oil pipelines and other infrastructure): Between April 2004 and March 2005, there were 683 attacks. During the same period the year before, there were 1,310 attacks. As of March, there had been 3,137 attacks since Uribe took office, a decrease of 36 percent compared to the Pastrana administration. Between January and March of this year, there were 148 attacks, a decrease of 34 percent compared to the same period in 2004.

-- Attacks on towns: in 2000, there were 85 and in 2004, there was only one. Uribe noted that there had already been one in 2005 (the FARC attacked the indigenous town of Toribio, Cauca Department in late April).

-- Combat between the military and illegal armed groups: In 2000, there were 811 combat actions and in 2004, there were 2,193. The Ambassador emphasized that the increasing number of clashes did not mean that the illegal armed groups were growing in strength, but rather that the military was more aggressive.

-- Attacks on the pipeline: As of March, there had been 55 attacks on the pipeline in 2005. There 93 in 2004, 179 in 2003, 64 in 2002, and 260 in 2001.

-- Attacks on energy towers: As of March, there had been 25 attacks in 2005. There were 121 in 2004, 329 in 2003, and 254 in 2001.

-- Individual demobilizations: As of March 2005, 641 individuals had deserted an illegal armed group and entered the GOC's reinsertion program. There were 2,972 in 2004, 2,538 in 2003, and 1,412 in 2002. Approximately half of these deserters come from the FARC.

14. (C) In response to a question from the CODEL, MOD Uribe acknowledged that Colombia was concerned about President Chavez' growing arms arsenal and close ties to Fidel Castro. He said the threat was exacerbated by the growing instability in the Andean region, such as in Bolivia and Ecuador.

15. (U) Uribe credited U.S. assistance and President Uribe's vision and leadership for the GOC's security successes. He noted that in the past year and a half, over 100,000 of the 370,000 members of the military and police had been trained in human rights. He reported that the Defense Ministry is streamlining the military's logistics system to avoid waste and inefficiency. In closing, he said the GOC had to stay on course to achieve lasting results and continued U.S. assistance was crucial.

Navy: Combating Drugs on Three Fronts

16. (C) Vice Admiral Guillermo Barrera, the Naval Operations Commander, briefed the CODEL on the Navy's counterdrug actions. He reported that the Navy's three areas of operation -- the north and Pacific coasts and country's rivers -- totaled 1.14 million square kilometers. Approximately 480 tons of drugs are shipped from the Pacific coast and 135 tons from the north coast each year. Resources are scarce. For example, the Pacific coast Naval units have one third of the equipment that the north coast units have, and the riverine area has only one fixed wing aircraft. Barrera assured the CODEL that the Navy works closely with other services to offset equipment shortages. When a ship, helicopter, and surveillance aircraft are all available for an operation, the Navy has a 70 percent success rate in locating and stopping an illicit drug shipment.

17. (C) In 2004, the Navy seized 77,000 kilograms of drugs, or almost USD 2 billion worth of drugs. In 1997, the Navy had only two bases. Today, there are five in Santa Marta, Cartagena, Turbo, Buenaventura, and Bahia Malaga. Four more will soon be open in Rioacha, San Andres Island, Barranquilla, and Tumaco thanks, in part, to U.S. assistance. The Navy is also working to develop more effective interdiction equipment.

18. (C) Comment: Although GOC statistics follow the trend line

of U.S. numbers, they often are derived from different
sources (like the UN) and therefore do not match ours. End
comment.
WOOD